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February 17, 2005

Joint Policy Committee

Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter  
101 Eighth Street, P.O. Box 2050  
Oakland, CA 94607-4756

Dear Joint Policy Committee Member:

I am writing to applaud the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Joint Policy Committee's first steps toward connecting land use and transit in the proposed Regional Transit-Oriented Development Policy, and to urge you to strengthen that policy by adopting our Livable Communities Platform, which will help ensure good land use around transit stations.

As the Bay Area's leading land conservation and urban planning non-profit, Greenbelt Alliance sees this policy as an integral part of creating a viable transit system, protecting open space and promoting livable communities. For transit to be effective, we must make transit convenient and accessible. When transit is nearby, more people ride, which means more funding from fares, and fewer cars on the road. The way to make transit convenient and efficient is to ensure that transit stations are surrounded by a vibrant mix of homes, shops, and jobs.

With the Regional Transit-Oriented Development Policy, you have a historic opportunity to address many of the Bay Area's biggest challenges— transit funding difficulties, growth pressures, traffic congestion, air quality problems and an affordable housing shortage—with one comprehensive tool. If you take this opportunity to ensure that new transit stations are surrounded by good development, you will be helping to solve these challenges while creating attractive, vibrant communities.

However, the policy you are considering does not go far enough. Calling for cities to plan for certain thresholds of housing and jobs along transit corridors and create plans for the half-mile areas around stations are good first steps. But they will not be enough, for the following reasons:

- First, setting a combined threshold for housing and jobs would allow cities to plan for offices and shops only, without a balance of

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housing along transit corridors—and housing is desperately needed to boost ridership and make transit effective. Furthermore, while we understand the need for flexibility in a regional policy, setting thresholds that are not high enough to affect growth patterns will render the policy ineffective. We urge you to set separate thresholds for housing and jobs and to make them high. We understand that thresholds will have to vary according to type of transit line and location. We are eager to work with you to determine what levels of growth are appropriate along the corridors.

- Second, the current proposal does not address the need for housing that is affordable for families earning low incomes: the very people who need housing and use transit most. Promoting affordable housing in station areas provides riders and helps cities to address the region's affordable housing crisis. One mechanism to promote affordable housing is to allow cities to count affordable units at a higher rate towards meeting their housing thresholds. An appropriate range would be to count each affordable unit as 1.25 market rate units. Another mechanism would be requiring twenty percent of units in station areas to be affordable. Again, we are eager to work with you to determine appropriate mechanisms and levels of affordability.
- Third, without guidelines for station area planning, this policy could allow for development that destroys the pedestrian and bike environment. As cities prepare station area plans, they should be required to study their parking needs and ways to minimize parking. In suburban station areas, parking should be reduced to no more than 1 space per studio or 1-bedroom units, no more than 1.5 spaces per 2-bedroom or larger units, reduced requirements for affordable and senior units, and no more than 2.5 spaces per 1,000 gross square footage for retail and commercial space. Also in station area plans cities should be required to create safe pedestrian and bike routes and to limit block lengths to no more than 500 feet to ensure walkability.

In conjunction with the Transportation and Land Use Coalition and the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, Greenbelt Alliance has created a Livable Communities Platform. We have discussed the platform with a number of JPC members; we appreciate the time you spent on this, and we have considered and incorporated many of your recommendations into the platform.

We now urge you to strengthen the proposed Regional Transit Oriented Development Policy by including the following Livable Communities Platform.

Before MTC funds new transit projects, cities should have to:

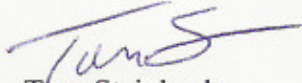
- Plan for a high threshold of housing along corridors, separate from a jobs threshold.
- Promote affordable housing in station areas.
- Create station area plans that include:
  - Studies that analyze minimizing the space dedicated to parking,
  - Bicycle and pedestrian plans for safe routes to and within station areas, and
  - Blocks no more than 500 feet in length to ensure walkability.

As our region continues to grow over the next twenty years, we need a strong transit system surrounded by compact development to maintain our economic viability and our environmental sustainability. This policy is a critical piece of making that happen.

With this policy, you have the opportunity to create a better future for the Bay Area.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. We look forward to working closely with you to establish a strong policy.

Sincerely,



Tom Steinbach  
Executive Director  
Greenbelt Alliance